



yellowbelly water snake

Nerodia erythrogaster flavigaster

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Reptilia
Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae

Features

The rarest of Iowa's water snakes, the yellowbelly water snake, has a chocolate brown back and yellow to yellow-orange belly. It lacks markings. The yellow-orange belly is the most obvious way to distinguish it from the venomous cottonmouths found in Missouri. It ranges from 30 to 48 inches long and is one of Iowa's largest water snakes.

Natural History

The yellowbelly water snake is found only in a few scattered populations along the Mississippi River south of Muscatine, where it is associated with quiet pools. It eats fish, frogs, and probably crayfish. Like most water snakes, this species is aggressive if cornered. When captured, they excrete a foul-smelling material on their captor. Yellowbellies mate in May and June and young are born in August or September.

Habitats

Mississippi River

Iowa Status

federally endangered, native

Iowa is along the northern extreme of its range. It is associated with backwater areas along large rivers. The federally endangered redbelly subspecies recently was discovered along the Mississippi River south of Muscatine.

Iowa Range

southeast corner of Iowa

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.